

**TO:** Members of the Children and Families Health and Human Services Interim Committee

**FROM:** Claudia Clifford, Advocacy Director AARP Montana

**RE:** Recommendations to Improve Montana's Guardianship System

Chairman Ehli and members of the committee, AARP Montana appreciates your work to look at ways to improve our system of guardianships. In fact, I think it is a stretch to say that we even have a system beyond a basic process of district courts appointing guardians. There is much to be done to create a guardianship system in Montana that is accountable, accessible and serves Montanans who need guardians in their best interest.

This work will take time. Our recommendations to your committee are to set up a structure for making progress on needed improvements over time and with input from stakeholders. Therefore, AARP Montana recommends that this committee consider taking the following steps in legislation for 2017:

- Form a WINGS Committee (Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders). One option is to administratively attach it to the Court Administrator's office.
- Adopt National Guardianship Standards of Practice.
- Appropriate funding for grants to local entities to provide public guardianship services; grants could be awarded in consultation with the WINGS committee.
- WINGS committee should work on a proposal of standards for court monitoring of guardianships; standards for appointment of guardians; minimum training requirements for guardians; and address other shortcomings of the guardianship system and processes.

Guardianship is a necessary system for incapacitated individuals. Guardians are delegated the authority to make decisions related to the well-being and financial matters of their ward. This a serious and profound assignment of rights and responsibilities. We must make sure that the guardianship system works in the best interest of those people who need it. Thank you for your work on this important issue.